

Minutes: Master Plan Steering Committee – September 9, 2020 – Virtual Meeting

Committee Members attending: Janne Corneil (Chair), Stacy Lennon, Kerry Kissinger, Madeleine Blake, Bob Zogg, John Ballantine, Tanya White.

Absent: Barney Arnold, Angie Verge, Lynne Lipinsky, Eva Mostoufi, Jason Molten, Jessica Nierenberg.

Also in Attendance: George Mansfield, Gretchen Caywood, Mary-Lynne Bohn (Westford St), and Carren Panico (Mosquito).

Janne called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

MPSC membership

Janne thanked Mary-Lynne for her interest in joining the MPSC and for attending tonight's meeting and pointed out that she will be appointed to the Committee by the PB, as required, at its 9/14/20 meeting.

Janne also explained that both Jason and Jessica have confirmed that they will need to resign from the Committee due to increased schedule demands and complications at this time. Their resignations will be accepted at the upcoming PB meeting.

Interim report and discussion with the MP (Scope) Advisory Group

Stacy led this discussion and explained that George has officially appointed her, John and Bob to this Advisory Group which has met a few times and discussed what the scope and schedule for the MP might look like, and what recommendations we are considering providing to the MPSC. Once they have finalized their recommendations, George will report to the PB on the recommended revised schedule, scope and recommendations for the MP. Stacy said that we are realizing that a June 2021 completion date is difficult as we look at what needs to be completed and what is required to have a robust public engagement schedule. Stacy said that the group is considering a September 2021 timeframe for the draft plan but would likely need until December 2021 to prepare the final report. She added that while this is not a final recommendation, they wanted to let the MPSC know what they are thinking.

Concerning the scope, Stacy said they do not think there will be big changes to the master plan work tasks but need to determine committee assignments and the capacity of the committee to undertake said tasks. Overall, the Advisory Group sees the MP as requiring some combination of internal help, subject matter expertise help and a project manager/planner who shepherds the process, and a very active role for the MPSC. Stacy explained this will require that we, a volunteer committee shoulder most of the work, as we do not have the funds to hire a new full-service MP consultant. John described that the MPSC would break up into several subgroup "task forces" of MPSC members to address certain parts of the MP, meaning a commitment of at least several months, or up to the entire year, and reporting back to the MPSC in coordination with the project manager. John added that the other important effort that will go on simultaneously is community outreach and communication so that there is a full deliberation with existing committees and with the community, leading to a complete consensus on the MP. All members of the MPSC will be sharing the burden, and this is why we think this will take a full year to make it happen.

Master Plan Steering Committee

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Bob then spoke to the finances, explaining that the Advisory Group is in the process of reviewing the remaining MP budget in detail, in terms of expenses for further outside assistance we might need, including intern work, a GIS specialist, a technical editor, and a graphics specialist. Bob explained that after adding up what might be needed for outside assistance, about \$55,000 would remain for a project manager. Bob pointed out that with the projected necessary schedule extension, this will lead to a lower number of allowed weekly hours for a project manager to be involved, but that the only two possibilities are to make this work or to shorten the schedule.

The Advisory Group suggested that the subject matter experts would be on-call, as opposed to having a specific scope of work, but with small well-defined assignments along the way. Kerry said that in his opinion, the value of a project manager is to drive a schedule and drive a budget, but Bob explained that the Advisory Group does not feel there are sufficient funds to make a project manager responsible for the delivery of the MP. Janne pointed out that the project manager will be working in close collaboration with the MPSC, and that while the financial budget is small, there is a large budget in volunteer time, with many things going on at once, and so a project manager is essential to coordinate the work. The Advisory Group also felt that the project manager needs also be an experienced urban planner. George said that the project manager generally sets goals and deadlines, oversees the process and help us keep on track. The Advisory Group also pointed out that there should be someone on the MPSC side working closely with the project manager. Bob said that the group is reviewing the schedule of work to determine if more can be done in parallel to shorten the overall timeframe of the project, which may help the budget.

Mary-Lynne asked if grant funding had been sought. Janne said that at a couple of points during the process, the MPSC had researched the grant landscape, and at that time had determined that there was little available for a comprehensive MP effort, but that it may be possible to find grant funding to address specific parts of the MP – for example energy, housing, etc. Madeleine and George noted they are both keeping abreast of grant opportunities. Madeleine referred to contacts in the MA Association of Planning Commissioners (MAPC) regarding grant possibilities, and noted that the regional planning agency prepared the MP for Pepperell, and she offered to follow up with Lisa Davis, who is a planning consultant for that town. Bob pointed out that while grant funds will be helpful, we cannot rely on grant funding to forward this process in the immediate time frame.

Bob suggested that perhaps graduate students could be helpful as interns for the MP, and Janne noted that both Harvard and MIT have planning programs that may allow for this possibility. Stacy said that the Advisory Group is working on a revised schedule and work plan for the MP, and Kerry pointed out that once we have this, we will know where we need assistance and expertise. Kerry suggested that we create a one-page Letter of Understanding that clearly communicates what would be expected of a Project Manager so that there can be agreement on expectations and outcomes. He said that it would help us clarify our needs by having to commit them to pen and paper. John pointed out that the revised work plan will be a variation of what Janne had put forward, and the key is that the entire MPSC must step up to get this MP done, with a project manager to help coordinate and build it together. Madeleine thanked Stacy, Bob and John for their advisory work thus far.

The MPSC members again discussed the MP budget limitations for hiring a project manager, and Janne pointed out that there will always be a certain amount of risk. Bob stressed that coaching the MPSC and managing deliverables will require a project manager with planning experience. Madeleine said that

the tasks for the project manager must be laid out very specifically to help ensure a successful outcome. She pointed out how in the process with CM, the work transitioned much more to the MPSC along the way, and that perhaps too much “fluidity” caused some difficulties. Stacy agreed, pointing out that a detailed work plan is needed, with rigorously assigned responsibilities. Janne said that the MPSC is now in much better shape to be specific about the scope of work as there is a clearer picture of what the challenges are and what work needs to be done, now that we are half way through the process. Bob reminded the Committee that the risks of not moving ahead, and not doing a MP, are greater than the risks going forward, and that there will be risk no matter how detailed the work plan is.

Stacy thanked the MPSC members, acknowledging that the conversation is not complete, but that the Advisory Group wanted to start the exchange. Pointing out that we are now talking about a year beyond what the MPSC volunteers had signed up for, she asked everyone to think about and be sure whether they wish to continue, as the work going forward will require everyone’s best efforts. Janne asked each member to reach out to her to confirm whether they wish to continue and, if so, what area(s) they are interested in working on. The Committee agreed to meet on 9/23/20.

Minutes

The Board reviewed the draft Minutes from the 8/26/20 meeting and a few amendments were suggested. Madeleine moved to approve the Minutes as amended, Kerry seconded the motion, and it was approved 6-0-1 (Tanya abstained) by roll call vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen Caywood